



**Opening Statement of Rep. James Comer (R-KY)
Republican Leader, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human
Services
Hearing on “Strengthening Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse
and Neglect”
March 26, 2019**

Thank you for yielding.

As a dad to three young kids, today’s topic is a tough one to discuss. No child should ever have to endure the pain of abuse or neglect by a parent or caregiver, and that’s why today’s hearing is so important.

The *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act* (CAPTA) is the key federal legislation that helps states combat child abuse and neglect. This legislation, which was enacted in 1974, provides states with grant funding to develop programs aimed at prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment.

The scope of this law is significant, and the number of children that are affected by abuse and neglect each year is staggering and absolutely heartbreaking. In 2016, child protective services (CPS) received over 4 million referrals involving 7.4 million children. Teachers, law enforcement, and social services professionals accounted for over half of all referrals. Of those 4 million reports, 2.2 million received a direct response from child protective services. Of that number, approximately 676,000 children were determined to be victims of abuse or neglect.

While neglect is notoriously more challenging to confirm, it still accounted for close to 75 percent of cases reported to CPS. And while we know that abuse can have serious lasting impacts on children well into the later parts of their lives, research shows that the effects of neglect can be just as detrimental. In fact, some studies have shown that neglect can have an even greater impact on a child’s healthy brain development.

As this committee works to make CAPTA more effective in our fight against child abuse and neglect, our efforts should begin with prevention. Prevention takes a holistic approach to combating neglect and abuse by focusing on strengthening communities and educating parents and caregivers on how to keep children safe. CAPTA receives \$158 million in annual appropriations, with \$39.8 million designated specifically for Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CB-CAP) formula grants which support community-level organizations focused on preventing child abuse and neglect.

In addition to bolstering our prevention efforts, this committee's work should streamline current assurances and requirements, so states can focus on serving and providing treatment to children, rather than spending more time filling out paperwork. State agencies benefit from increased flexibility that allows them to respond more swiftly and effectively to reports of abuse and neglect. We must equip states with the tools and resources needed to address maltreatment and keep kids safe.

Children who have suffered abuse and neglect have unique needs, and it is our duty to ensure they receive exemplary care. I have no doubt that this subcommittee can lead this effort and champion bipartisan initiatives that strengthen CAPTA. I look forward to today's discussion about how we as a nation can effectively and compassionately serve these children.

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